

Lesson Plan

Instructor: Umme Habiba

Topic: Handling Difficult Conversations in the U.S. (Disagreeing Politely & Giving Constructive Feedback)

Level: Intermediate (CEFR B1–B2)

Age Group: 20–25

Class: REAL 200 – Intermediate Level

Skill Focus: Speaking (pragmatic competence, fluency, tone, and vocabulary)

Duration: 50 minutes

Materials: Whiteboard, markers, projector, presentation slides with conversation prompts, short video clip of workplace disagreement

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Politely disagree with others in both formal and casual situations.
 2. Give feedback that is clear, helpful, and culturally appropriate.
 3. Adjust their tone to match the level of formality in different conversations.
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Activities

1. Warm-Up [5 min]

Prompt: “When was the last time you disagreed with someone? How did you handle it?”

Teacher Actions:

- Present the prompt to the class.
- Listen to student responses and select a few examples.
- Note different approaches on the board (e.g., direct, indirect, neutral).

Student Actions:

- Share experiences with a partner.
- Contribute to class discussion when examples are gathered.

2. Vocabulary & Expression Modeling [8 min]**Teacher Actions:**

- **Present phrases on slides:**
- Polite Disagreement: “I see your point, but...”, “I understand what you’re saying, however...”, “That’s interesting, though I think...”
- Constructive Feedback: “One thing that might help is...”, “Have you considered...?”, “It might be better if...”
- Explain the difference between formal and informal usage.
- Facilitate a brief interactive matching task: students match phrases to appropriate contexts (formal/informal).

Student Actions:

- Repeat each phrase aloud.
- Identify whether each phrase is formal or informal.

- Complete the matching activity in pairs or small groups.

4. Listening Model & Analysis [7 min]

Teacher Actions:

- Play two short dialogues:
 1. Friends debating weekend plans (casual)
 2. Coworkers discussing a missed deadline (formal)
- Checklist/note-taking guide for students:
 1. Identify casual vs. formal tone
 2. Note key words or phrases that indicate formality
 3. Observe differences in politeness strategies and expressions
 4. Facilitate a brief discussion after each dialogue.

Student Actions:

- Listen carefully to each dialogue.
- Use the checklist to take notes on tone, words, and expressions
- Compare casual vs. formal language with a partner and share observations.

4. Guided Role-Play Practice (10 min)

- Pairs receive short disagreement prompts (e.g., “Your friend wants to eat at a restaurant you dislike,” “Your classmate’s part of the project was incomplete”).
- Students practice using at least one polite disagreement phrase and one constructive feedback phrase.
- Teacher circulates, noting tone and vocabulary usage.

5. Main Task: Group Scenario Performance (15 min)

- Groups of 3 choose one scenario:
 1. Giving feedback to a group member in a class project
 2. Telling a roommate they are too loud at night
 3. Disagreeing with a coworker about a meeting plan
- Groups have 5 minutes to prepare and 2–3 minutes to act out their scenario.
- Teacher observes using formative checklist.

6. Wrap-Up & Reflection (5 min)

- Students share: “One phrase I will try this week when I disagree politely.”
 - Teacher gives brief oral feedback and highlights positive language use.
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Assessment**Formative:**

- Teacher checklist during role-plays:
 - o Politeness markers used
 - o Appropriate tone for the context
 - o Relevant vocabulary
 - o Clear, logical ideas

Summative Assessment Rubric – Group Scenario Performance

Category	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets Expectations (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Below Expectations (1)
Tone & Politeness (25%)	Consistently uses a respectful tone appropriate to the situation; demonstrates strong cultural awareness.	Tone is generally respectful and appropriate with only minor lapses.	Tone is sometimes inappropriate or politeness is inconsistent.	Tone is often inappropriate; politeness markers missing.
Vocabulary Use (25%)	Uses a wide range of polite disagreement and feedback expressions naturally and accurately; vocabulary clearly matches context.	Uses polite expressions correctly most of the time; vocabulary is generally appropriate.	Uses limited or partially correct polite expressions; vocabulary occasionally mismatched.	Uses very limited or incorrect polite expressions; vocabulary inappropriate for context.
Fluency (25%)	Speaks smoothly and confidently with minimal hesitation; ideas flow logically.	Some hesitation or pauses, but overall meaning is clear.	Frequent pauses or repetition disrupt flow; ideas somewhat disorganized.	Long pauses, repetition, or unclear speech make it difficult to follow.

Category	Exceeds Expectations (4)	Meets Expectations (3)	Needs Improvement (2)	Below Expectations (1)
Task Completion (25%)	Fully addresses all parts of the scenario; adapts tone and vocabulary effectively.	Completes most parts of the scenario; some adaptation to tone and vocabulary.	Misses key parts of the scenario; minimal adaptation to tone and vocabulary.	Does not complete the task; no adaptation to tone or vocabulary.

Rationale

This lesson builds on the skills introduced in Weeks 4 and 5, moving from identifying challenges and building rapport toward navigating more complex and potentially tense social interactions. Intermediate-level ESL learners often struggle with expressing disagreement in a culturally appropriate way. While direct disagreement is common in some cultures, in American contexts, a more indirect and polite style is often preferred, especially in professional or semi-formal environments (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

By explicitly teaching polite disagreement phrases and constructive feedback language, students gain tools to maintain relationships while still expressing honest opinions. The lesson follows the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) by focusing on authentic communication tasks that mirror real-life situations students may encounter both socially and professionally. The inclusion of listening activities ensures learners can recognize tone differences, a key aspect of pragmatic competence (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the use of peer role-play as a means to scaffold language production within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development. Students first model and analyze set phrases before applying them in controlled practice, then in more open-ended scenarios. This gradual release from teacher-led instruction to independent performance promotes both fluency and confidence.

The dual focus on formative and summative assessment ensures ongoing feedback and accountability. Formative checklists during role-plays help the teacher identify which students may need further scaffolding, while the summative group performance provides a snapshot of each learner's ability to integrate tone, vocabulary, and communicative purpose.

Finally, this topic connects naturally to previous lessons — Week 4 addressed *challenges and solutions* for life in the U.S., Week 5 developed *politeness and small talk*, and Week 6 extends these skills into *conflict resolution and feedback*. Together, these lessons build a coherent progression toward more nuanced and socially effective communication in English.

Homework

Interview a classmate, friend, or coworker about a time they disagreed with someone. Ask:

- What was the disagreement?
- How did they express their opinion?
- How did the other person react?

Write 5–6 sentences summarizing the conversation, including at least two polite disagreement phrases from today's class.

References

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ishihara, N., & Cohen, A. D. (2010). *Teaching and learning pragmatics: Where language and culture meet*. Pearson Education.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.